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SPENSER'S FOWRE HYMNES

In the green period of his youth, a student at Cambridge or fresh from its halls, wrapt in the sweet spell of Ficino, of Benivieni, of Castiglione, Spenser composed two hymns in honour of love and beauty. Many years later, in sobered middle life, he wrote two other hymns, of heavenly love and beauty, and, with abundant apology for the "lewdness" of the earlier hymns, published the four.

These four hymns have recently been interpreted by a brilliant American scholar¹ as the culminating expression of that doctrine of romantic love which so fascinated the neo-Platonic mystics, the first two hymns describing the earlier stages in the progress of the ideal lover toward the attainment of perfect love and beauty, and the last two hymns completing the interpretation.

It is the purpose of this essay to put forth the view that, while the earlier hymns are in complete accord with this neo-Platonic theory of love, the later hymns are based upon Calvinistic doctrines that are squarely opposed to it and that admit of no compromise.

According to Castiglione, who gives the clearest and most direct explanation of the neo-Platonic doctrine, reducing to a clear prose statement a theory of love that appears elusive and half-veiled in the poetry, there are six stages in the history of the ideal lover, marking his progress from the moment when, a woe-begone mortal, he feels the promptings of love at the sight of a beautiful face to the time when, kindled by the most sacred fire of true divine love, without veil or cloud, the soul views the wide sea of pure divine beauty, and receives it unto herself.

First of all, the lover beholds a beautiful woman and loves her. Then, to alleviate the distress of separation he impresses her fair image upon his mind. Straightway, however, his imagination idealizes the face and she appears to his mind fairer than she really is. In the second stage it is this idealized face that the lover loves. But, once bent on the

¹ Professor J. B. Fletcher, *A Study in Renaissance Mysticism: Spenser's 'Fowre Hymnes,'* P. M. L. A. 19. 452.

quest of beauty, the true lover knows no stay. So anon, stimulated by this idealized image of his lady, he comes to form an image of a face which is, as it were, the sum of all loveliness, a combination of selected charms. In the language of Castiglione: "Besides these blessings (of beholding the idealized face) the lover will find another much greater still, if he will employ this love as a step to mount to one much higher; which he will succeed in doing if he continually considers within himself how narrow a restraint it is to be always occupied in contemplating the beauty of one body only; and therefore, in order to escape such close bonds as these, in his thought he will little by little add so many ornaments, that by heaping all beauties together he will form a universal concept, and will reduce the multitude of these beauties to the unity of that single beauty which is spread over human nature at large. In this way he will no longer contemplate the particular beauty of one woman, but the universal beauty which adorns all bodies".²

When the lover becomes fully aware that this concept of universal beauty is primarily the product of his own mind, he realizes that beauty must be an inherent part of the soul, and, the passion for beauty growing apace with each fresh activity of the spirit therein, he now joyously contemplates beauty as he finds it within himself, quite unembarrassed by any remembrance of the senses. So long as he had before him the image of a woman, even though it embodied the universal beauty of womanhood, he could not discern beauty with complete clearness, because the phantom bearing some resemblance to the substance, the shadow of the senses rested thereon. But now the veil of sense is entirely dissipated in the rays of the pure sun of beauty. Again in the words of Castiglione: "Then the soul . . . devoted to the contemplation of her own substance, as if awakened from deepest sleep, opens those eyes which all possess but few use, and sees in herself a ray of that light which is the true image of the angelic beauty communicated to her."³ This contemplation of beauty within the soul is, then, the fourth rung of the ladder which leads from

²Fourth book of the Courtier, 67, tr. by L. E. Opdycke.

³Ibid., p. 304.

love of physical beauty "to the lofty mansion where dwells the heavenly, lovely and true beauty which lies in the inmost secret recesses of God."

Now the same impulse which hitherto inclined the lover to universalize the beauty of woman, impells him to universalize that abstract beauty which he discovers within himself, and he feels out after and discovers that encircling, all-inclusive beauty of which he had before recognized but partial and subordinate manifestations. No longer does the soul contemplate beauty in her own particular intellect, but she looks forth, enraptured and ravished by its splendor, upon the vast sea of universal beauty.

The beauty of a particular woman, the idealized beauty of the same, the universal beauty of woman, beauty an inherent part of the human spirit, beauty all-encircling, identical with divine love, wisdom, goodness. Such is the progression.

Last stage of all, the soul, burning with the sacred fire of true love and yearning to unite herself with so great beauty, actually becomes identified therewith, incorporate in the life of God.

Such a doctrine, presupposing an inborn excellence in humanity, accepting the senses and even exalting them as aids to the spirit and recognizing a natural progression in the attainment of the divine life, such a doctrine is strictly Catholic. It could only have been formulated in a society permeated with Catholic thought and feeling.

This attitude towards the natural man marks the fundamental difference between the Catholic discipline and the Calvinistic. While the Calvinist regards the natural and the spiritual as irreconcilably opposed, and permits the one to exist only at the expense of the other, the Catholic accepts both the natural and the spiritual as gifts of God, though because it is temporary and its pleasure of a lower order, he recognizes that the one gift is less precious than the other. The Catholic appreciates that the senses may, and often do, suffer corruption, but while aware that the senses are thus of the earth, earthy, he also appreciates that they assist one heavenward, inasmuch as they offer a language wherewith God can make his thoughts partially known to man, and are an indispensable medium in

the earlier stages of man's spiritual development. Hence the physical element is present in every appeal that the Church makes to man. Harmonious colours, sweet sound and fragrant odours suggest to the imagination, through the senses, the inscrutable glories of the Unseen. The holy eucharist itself, the very heart of Catholicism, is a mystical blending of the natural and the supernatural, wherein God takes advantage of physical means to impart his saving health to a needy humanity. The Catholic must perforce regard the senses with favour, since they thus establish a channel of intercourse between God and man.

While the Catholic thus recognizes no sharp line of cleavage between the senses and the spirit, and passes easily from the realm of the one to the realm of the other, he believes that the body, with the shadow of earth resting upon it, must gradually be consumed by the encroaching fire of the spirit. Therefore the normal development of a life is the gradual metamorphosis of the natural into the spiritual, the spirit of God suffusing itself through the natural, purifying it from all earthly dross, and transforming it into the divine likeness.

To the Catholic the human spirit is not a sorry weed, but a sun-inclined flower, and to the neo-Platonic Catholics the sight of a beautiful woman was the natural foundation for a religious transformation. How far removed from Calvinism! Calvinism, that held the natural man to be altogether vile and sinful; Calvinism, armed with its scourge, that would drive out the senses and cleanse the house, that God might enter in.

A man, and of all men a poet, is hard put to it when he must choose between the things that he loves; when he must give up the one that he lose not the other. A dream of a fair lady, a walk with her through sun-suffused meadows and woodlands of kindly shade, the sight of a city whose loveliness invites the soul and draws it on so sweetly that it forgets that the fair lady has faded from his side, a welcome entry within the city gates. This was the dream that Calvinism asked the poet Spenser to renounce. To be sure it promised entry to the same fair city, but by how different a road! A road that led by a sorrow-crowned hill and through the valley of remorse. Which would the poet choose? The four hymns give the answer.

In the "Hymne in Honour of Love", the first of the four, the attraction of beauty for the lover and the effect of the passion of love upon him are explained. While the lower animals multiply through lust, man is prompted by divine inspiration, and he therefore seeks beauty, which is heavenly in origin:

But man that breathes a more immortal mynd,
Not for lusts sake, but for eternitie,
Seeks to enlarge his lasting progenie:
For, having yet in his deducted spright
Some sparks remaining of the heavenly fyre,
He is enlumined with that goodly light,
Unto like goodly semblant to aspyre;
Therefore in choice of love he doth desyre
That seemes on earth most heavenly to embrace,
That same is Beautie, borne of heavenly race.

For sure of all that in this mortall frame
Contained is, nought more divine doth seem,
Or that resembleth more the immortall flame
Of heavenly light, than Beauties glorious beame.

The attractive power of beauty being so great, Love, the imperious boy, shoots his arrow from the lady's eyes and causes great suffering to the lover, but only to test the lover's loyalty and worth. Lust cannot stand this test, but true love can. For the sincere lover,

Such is the powre of that sweet passion,
That it all sordid baseness doth expell,
And the refyned mynd doth newly fashion
Unto a fairer forme, which now doth dwell
In his high thought, that would it selfe excell,
Which he beholding still with constant sight,
Admires the mirrour of so heavenly light,

Whose image printing in his deepest wit,
He thereon feeds his hungrie fantasy.

We are thus found to be in the familiar atmosphere of the neo-Platonic doctrine of love, though only the first two stages of the progression are given: the attraction of a fair face for the lover, and his idealization of its beauty.

In the "Hymne in Honour of Beautie", in addition to these first two, the third and fourth stages are presented. After explaining that love is ordained in heaven, and that the sincere

lover consequently does not love the first pretty woman that he sees, the lover's advancement in the appreciation of beauty is thus explained :

But they, which love indeede, looke otherwise,
With pure regard and spotlesse true intent,
Drawing out of the object of their eyes
A more refyned forme, which they present
Unto their mind, voide of all blemishment;
Which it reducing to her first perfection,
Beholdeth free from fleshes frayle infection.

And then conforming it unto the light,
Which in it selfe it hath remaining still,
Of that first Sunne, yet sparkling in his sight,
Thereof he fashions in his higher skill
An heavenly beautie to his fancies will;
And, it embracing in his mind entyre,
The mirrour of his owne thought doth admyre.

As in the preceding hymn, there is first the beautiful face and then the idealization of it. But not content to stop here, the mind of the lover now discovers the universal type, the pure idea, of which the beauty of any particular woman is but a porch lamp, and then, quickened to a partial remembrance of that divine beauty which it had erstwhile known in heaven, the eager mind turns its eyes inward and admires the vision of heavenly beauty thus at length discovered within itself. With this stage, the second hymn concludes.

So much is Spenser an exponent of the neo-Platonic doctrines in this hymn that he does not hesitate to say that beauty in woman is brought from heaven by the soul, and that, being an immortal thing, it is absolutely incapable of corruption. However much the flesh may be defiled, beauty is ever intact and resides beyond the reach of taint.

Had Spenser remained satisfied with his neo-Platonism, when he returned to the theme of the hymns in later life he would simply have completed the exposition so well begun and have described the conduct of the soul as it gained a larger and larger understanding of the beauty which is God, and, crowning stage of all, its rhapsodic union with the divine life. As a matter of fact, he turns his back upon all that he had so feelingly expounded in the first two hymns, repeatedly disclaims any faith in earthly love as an aid to soul develop-

ment and expounds a new sequence of stages, based upon Calvinistic dogma, for the heaven-bent progress of the soul.

In the "Hymne of Heavenly Love" is shown the surpassing love of Christ, the great Lord of Love, in his merciful redemption of mankind, and the reciprocal beatific growth in love of the man who gives himself wholly to the love of Christ is portrayed. One must fully and freely give himself to Christ, love him with all his heart and soul and mind, completely renounce all other loves. If one does so, a consuming passion for Christ will take possession of the soul, entirely absorbing one's life, leaving room for delight in no earthly thing. One will never wish to turn his eyes from a sight so sweet and amiable. If one thus experiences this passion for Christ, the vision of the man-Christ will be replaced by the vision of the God-Christ, the "Idée" of Christ:

Then shall thy ravisht soule inspired bee
With heavenly thought farre above humane skil,
And thy bright radiant eyes shall plainly see
The Idee of his pure glorie present still
Before thy face, that all thy spirit shall fill
With sweete enragement of celestial love,
Kindled through sight of those faire things above.

Just as in the neo-Platonic system the lover, after idealizing the beauty of the one he loves, comes to perceive the perfect type of beauty in woman, as it were the model resident in the thought of God, or, as Plato would have it, the *Idea* of feminine beauty, so if the love of Christ, who became a man and died for mankind, takes possession of the life, one will come to see his full perfection, will replace the picture of Christ moving among men and dying on the cross, with the vision of Christ as one with God; will see Christ as he essentially is, see him as God sees him. Then will the soul be filled with the divine love and will experience that felicity which is vouchsafed to those who enter into this mystic relation with God.

The approach to God through Christ, as explained in this hymn, not only does not grow out of the experience of earthly love, but is absolutely antagonistic to it. Calvinistic theology is not imposed upon a superstructure of neo-Platonism; one does not advance from love of woman and adoration of her beauty to the love of Christ and adoration of God. The natural

man is totally corrupt until he experiences the redemptive love of Christ; the human heart is wholly of flint, until touched and softened by remorse; the human mind totally abased, "moyled in durty pleasures", until uplifted by Christ's "soveraine mercie." In the language of Calvin, until renewed by the grace of Christ "man is but rottenness and a worm, abominable and vain, drinking in 'iniquity like water'." ⁴ There is no room in such a theology for the partial salvation of man through earthly love. Salvation is wholly of Christ, and an unsaved man is lost in sin, miserable, utterly debased. Scant room here for the engaging fancy that Christ takes over the half blown flower that some maiden has been tending. Love of woman is merely one of those loves

with which the world doth blind

Weake fancies, and stirre up affections base.

It is a "mad fit", which only fools call love, and when the heat expires nothing but ashes remains. For Spenser, to love a woman is no longer to find God. Distrust of so-called beauty and stern asceticism replace the pleasing fancy of the Italian mystic.

The "Hymne of Heavenly Love" thus sets forth how the soul may advance through love to mystic union with God as Christ, the redeemer of the world. The "Hymne of Heavenly Beautie" explains how the soul may advance through contemplation of God's handiwork to mystic union with Sapiencia; Sapiencia, which may signify the Holy Spirit, as ingeniously and brilliantly maintained by Professor Fletcher, or which may stand for Christ as the Logos, the mind of God, as distinguished from the Christ of the third hymn, the redemptive love of God. Two avenues of approach to God are thus open; one, through the loving mercy of Christ, the other, through mystic contemplation.

In the "Hymne of Heavenly Beautie" the poet first suggests that one who would enter into the mysteries of intellectual beauty begin with observing the admirable beauty of the earth, then the beauty of the air, and then the beauty of the sky, all sown with glistering stars and ruled by the sun and moon, as it were the king and queen of day and night. Looking upon these let one appreciate that

⁴ *Institutes*, 3. 12. 5.

farre above these heavens which here we see,
 Be others farre exceeding these in light,
 Not bounded, not corrupt, as these same bee,
 But infinite in largeness and in hight,
 Unmoving, uncorrupt, and spotlesse bright,
 That need no Sunne t'illuminate their spheres,
 But their own native light farre passing theirs.

But because the eye cannot visualize splendor so far surpassing anything the earthly eye can behold, one must try to form some conception of the majestic beauty of God through reflecting upon the goodness of God as revealed in his handiwork:

The meanes, therefore, which unto us is lent
 Him to behold, is on his workes to looke,
 Which he hath made in beauty excellent,
 And in the same, as in a brasen booke,
 To reade enregistered in every nooke
 His goodnesse, which his beautie doth declare;
 For all thats good is beautifull and faire.

Thus mounting upon wings of contemplation, humbled with fear and reverence, let the soul approach the awful splendor of the majesty of God, where he sits upon the throne of truth, built upon eternity, from which proceed pure and bright beams, which encompass his presence with glorious light, while

in his bosom Sapience doth sit,
 The souveraine dearling of the Deity,
 Clad like a Queene in royall robes.

Whosoever is allowed to look thereon, bereft of sense, and transported with delight, experiences the ecstatic bliss of heaven.

This is that supreme experience which the neo-Platonic mystics felt to be the ultimate reward of the true lover. But though Spenser has acknowledged it to be the fruits of the contemplation of God's handiwork, the poet is careful not to make any mention of beauty in woman as a part of that handiwork. When he enumerates those works they are all the wonders of external nature, on the one hand, and God's truth, love, wisdom, bliss, grace, judgment, mercy and might, on the other. Indeed the beauty of woman is actually a painful and mortifying memory as mundane and misleading as love of ostentation or riches:

And that faire lampe, which useth to inflame
The hearts of men with self-consuming fyre
Thenceforth seems fowle, and full of sinfull blame:
And all that pomp to which proud minds aspyre
By name of honor, and so much desyre,
Seemes to them baseness, and all riches drosse,
And all mirth sadnesse, and all lucre losse.

It is a false beauty that misleads "with flattering bait" and leads one to "pursue vain deceitful shadows."

How great the contrast between this attitude toward woman's beauty and that of Castiglione, who, in the moment of ecstasy, could still hark back to beauty in woman as that which inspired the soul to seek for the beauty which is God; Castiglione, who, in that moment, saw things celestial and terrestrial held by one common bond, and in beauty "the sweetest bond of the universe": "Thou art father of true pleasure, of grace, of peace, of gentleness and goodwill, enemy to rustic savagery and sloth—in short, the beginning and the end of every good. And since thou delightest to inhabit the flower of beautiful bodies and beautiful souls, and thence sometimes to display thyself a little to the eyes and minds of those who are worthy to behold thee, methinks that now thy abode is here amongst us".⁵

In thus recognizing the contemplation of nature as an avenue of approach to the Divine, Spenser is in complete accord with the doctrines of Calvin. The metallic sharpness and hardness of Calvin's legalistic thinking is in marked contrast to the hymns, suffused with mysticism as they are, but the doctrinal basis is the same. It would almost seem that Spenser had turned fresh from the "Institutes" when he penned the stanzas which speak of God's universal revelation of himself in nature:

These unto all he daily doth display,
And shew himselfe in the image of his grace,
As in a looking-glasse, through which he may
Be seene of all his creatures vile and base,
That are unable else to see his face,
His glorious face! which glistereth else so bright,
That the Angels selves cannot endure the sight.

⁵ Ibid., p. 306.

The meanes, therefore, which unto us is lent
 Him to behold, is on his workes to looke,
 Which he hath made in beauty excellent,
 And in the same as in a brasen booke,
 To read enregistered in every nooke
 His goodnesse, which his beautie doth declare,
 For all that's good is beautifull and faire.

Compare with these stanzas the following sentences from Calvin's chapter on the revelation of God in the creation and continued government of the world: "His essence, indeed, is incomprehensible, utterly transcending all human thought; but on each of his workes his glory is engraved in characters so bright, so distinct, and so illustrious, that none, however dull and illiterate, can plead ignorance as their excuse".⁶

"It is impossible to contemplate the vast and beautiful fabric as it extends around, without being overwhelmed by the immense weight of glory. Hence the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews elegantly describes the visible worlds as images of the invisible (Heb. XI. 3), the elegant structure of the world serving us as a kind of mirror, in which we may behold God, though otherwise invisible".⁷ "Hence it is obvious, that in seeking God, the most direct path and the fittest method is, not to attempt with presumptive curiosity to pry into his essence, which is rather to be adored than minutely discussed, but to contemplate him in his works, by which he draws near, becomes familiar, and in a manner communicates himself to us As Augustine expresses it, (in Psalm CXI. v), since we are unable to comprehend Him, and are, as it were, overpowered by his greatness, our proper course is to contemplate his works, and so refresh ourselves with his goodness".⁸

Spenser is also in accord with Calvin in believing that, though God's glory is thus displayed in nature to all humanity, only the elect are able to profit by it. Spenser says that only those who are chosen of God's grace may behold his Beloved, Sapience, and that she will bestow her riches only on those who are worthy to receive them, and again and again in the book from which quotations have already been

⁶Ibid., 5, 1; tr. by Henry Beveridge.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸Ibid., 9.

made Calvin affirms that any opinion which man can form in heavenly mysteries is the parent of error, that no sooner do we obtain some slight knowledge of deity, than we pass by the true God, and set up in his stead the dream and phantom of our own brain: "In vain for us, therefore, does Creation exhibit so many bright lamps lighted up to show forth the glory of its Author. Though they beam upon us from every quarter, they are altogether insufficient of themselves to lead us into the right path. Some sparks, undoubtedly, they do throw out; but these are quenched before they can give forth a brighter effulgence. Wherefore, the apostle, in the very place where he says that the worlds are the images of invisible things, adds that it is by faith we understand that they were framed by the word of God (Heb. XI. 3), thereby intimating that the invisible Godhead is indeed represented by such displays, but we have no eyes to perceive it until they are enlightened through faith by internal revelation from God".⁹

Spenser's distinction between God's revelation of himself in external nature and his revelation in the treatment of mankind, is Calvin's distinction between works of the first class and works of the second class. From the first class of works, those in accordance with the ordinary course of nature, may be learned the omnipotence and eternity of God; from the second class, those above the ordinary course of nature, the goodness, justice and mercy, the providence, power and wisdom of God.¹⁰ Calvin's exposition of these different kinds of revelation is compressed by the poet into the following stanza:

Cease then, my tongue! and lend unto my mind
Leave to bethinke how great that beautie is,
Whose utmost path so beautiful I fynd;
How much more those essential parts of his,
His truth, his love, his wisdom, and his blis,
His grace, his doome, his mercy, and his might,
By which he lends us of himselfe a sight!

⁹Ibid., 14.

¹⁰Ibid., 6-8.

The indebtedness of the last two hymns to Platonic and neo-Platonic writings is, to be sure, very great; hardly a stanza that is not reminiscent of Plato, of Ficino, of Benivieni, or of Bruno. But these Platonic and neo-Platonic origins are construed to the satisfaction of Calvinism and disciplined to its creed. For example, it is highly significant that though the passage in which Spenser argues that to enjoy heavenly beauty one must begin by observing the beauties of the lower world, is based upon Plato, Spenser confines himself to the beauties of external nature, while Plato speaks of the beauties of humanity, the fair forms, which lead one to contemplate the fair minds which they contain, the fair minds which lead on to the contemplation of the products of the mind, and so from stage to stage.

This interpretation of the hymns is exactly in accord with the language of the dedication, in which the poet speaks disparagingly of the first two hymns and professes to offer the last two as a corrective: "Having in the greene times of my youth, composed these former two Hymnes in the praise of Love and Beautie, and feeling that the same too much pleased those of like age and disposition, while being too vehemently caried with that kind of affection, do rather sucke out poyson to their strong passion, than honey to their honest delight, I was moved by the one of you two most excellent Ladies, to call in the same. But, being unable so to doe, by reason that many copies thereof were formerly scattered abroad, I resolved at least to amend, and, by way of retraction, to reforme them, making, instead of these two Hymnes of earthly or naturall love and beautie, two other of heavenly and celestiall." If Spenser still honestly looked upon beauty in woman as a natural introduction to the most exalted experience of the soul, this dedication is certainly a fine bit of insincerity.

Nor does the theory that the two later hymns represent the more advanced stages in the neo-Platonic progression find support in the "Faerie Queene". The "Faerie Queene" presents the ideals of chivalry as modified to conform to a court society, and its indebtedness to Castiglione is abundantly evident, but if, on the one hand, it avoids that deliberate self-

seeking which at times mars the consistency of "The Courtier" and impairs it as a Christian document, it avoids, on the other, the transcendentalism of Bembo. The knights of the "Faerie Queene" do not gain knowledge of the mysteries of divine beauty and love at the expense of the gentle ladies who first inducted them into the noble passion. In the economy of the "Faerie Queene" neither sex is sacrificed for the spiritual advancement of the other; man must realize himself through the inspiration of woman's love, and woman herself through the inspiration of man's. The ideal society is that in which men who are "wise, warlike, personable, courteous and kind"¹¹ love women who are courteous, kind, gracious and modest, and whose beauty is enhanced by the flower of chastity, transplanted from heavenly gardens;¹² chastity, which crowns the heads of ladies with coronals such as the angels wear¹³ and which causes their praise to be hymned by saints in heaven.¹⁴ Moreover, though love leads the base to sloth as well as to sensuality, the noble it prompts to high and worthy activity, suffering no idleness,

For love does alwaies bring forth bounteous deeds
And in each gentle heart desire of honor breeds.¹⁵

This mutual dependence of men and women is the basis of the allegory of love in the "Faerie Queene". Marinell, gently nurtured in purity and shielded from the society of woman, is not a normal man until his indifference is supplanted by love of Florimell; Florimell, preëminent in chastity, virtue and beauty,¹⁶ is yet a forlorn figure, assailed as she is by the rough love of the loutish youth, by the violent rapine love of the fisher, by the subtle, insinuating love of Porteus, and too timid and fearful to tell friend from foe,¹⁷ —a pathetic figure until she finds safe harbor in the protect-

¹¹ III. 4. 5.

¹² III. 5. 51-55.

¹³ III. 5. 53.

¹⁴ III. 8. 42.

¹⁵ II. 1. 49.

¹⁶ III. 5.

¹⁷ III. 4.

ing love of the self-reliant Marinell. And, to pass by the minor characters, Britomart and Artegall, around whom the love allegory is built and to whom the other characters serve as foils, find in each other that affection which satisfies the heart and that stability and sense of values that hold one to high and assured achievement. Spenser is careful to make it clear that for both Artegall and Britomart the love of the other was the one thing needful for full self-realization. Britomart is an ideal expression of the renaissance woman, feminine in affection, masculine in judgment and in strength of will. She possesses the delicacy of Florimell, without her timidity; the strength of Radigund, without her boldness and bourgeois vulgarity; the chastity and elevation of Belphebe, without her austerity and aloofness; the charm of Amoret, without the ardency, all too apparent, that was ever arousing passion in men. Britomart is a character of beautiful balance. Yet it is the love of Artegall that gives focus to her character. Similarly, Artegall, the acknowledged superior of other knights, has not complete mastery of himself until Britomart becomes enthroned in his life; before this he is unable to withstand the fascination and the intrigues of Radigund; after it, he cannot be tempted by the superior charms of Duessa; before this he is inconstant in the pursuit of his quest, the relief of Irene; after it, he

Went on his way; ne ever howre did cease
Till he redeemed had that Lady thrall.

"The Faerie Queene", in short, shows the equal worth of men and women and their mutual dependence. Love inspires men to brave deeds and large endeavor, and women to acts of gentleness and deeds of mercy. Through love they find themselves socially. The "Faerie Queene" lays emphasis upon the life of action, and the life of contemplation is not made an end in itself, but rather contemplation serves to make the life dynamic.

Though the "Faerie Queene", then, is a noble presentation of courtly ideals, it does not support the neo-Platonic theory that love leads the lover away from and beyond the beloved.

Is it not reasonable to conclude that Spenser had come to feel that, beautiful as the theory of the neo-Platonists might be, it was but a dream, not to be seriously entertained by the Christian, and that the "Hymne of Heavenly Love" and the "Hymne of Heavenly Beautie" record this conviction.

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